



2018 TAM Roundtable: Implementation and Agency Alignment

The “Implementation and Agency Alignment” session was a two-part session: an opening presentation by Holly Arnold and Justin Barclay of the Maryland Department of Transportation: Maryland Transit Authority (MDOT MTA), and a small-group breakout session discussing strategies for aligning TAM across a wide range of transit agency functions. Slides for the MDOT MTA presentation and the handout from the table discussion are available on the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) [2018 TAM Roundtable Site](#).

This document summarizes the highlights of the small group discussions, which were focused around how agencies will continue to implement and integrate TAM concepts with other agency objectives and functions, particularly after the October 1, 2018 compliance deadline passes. Participants at small tables discussed integration of the TAM program with each of nine organizational functions, then presented a summary of the discussion to the whole group. The [discussion guide](#) is available on the 2018 TAM Roundtable site. The nine group discussions focused on aligning TAM with the following functions:

1. Safety
2. Capital Planning
3. Project Delivery
4. Risk Management
5. State and MPO Coordination
6. Agency Strategic Planning
7. Data Management/Governance
8. Workforce Development
9. Federal Compliance

At a high level, the nine groups agreed largely on some key recommendations, particularly around the need for coordination and organizational integration. Three common themes that arose from the group discussions were:

- Leverage the TAM requirements and program as an **opportunity to engage—or bridge the gap with—other key functional groups** and discuss shared priorities for project delivery, operations, and maintenance.
- Identify concrete **agency policies, procedures, strategic plans, documents, and guidance** that may impact—or be impacted by—the TAM program and work throughout the organization to make updates.
- Recognize that **agency size and resources affect the necessary approaches** for TAM program integration, and tailor outreach to effectively engage different specialists (e.g. maintenance staff, engineers, operators, and the back office), throughout the asset lifecycle.

The sections below summarize each group’s discussion and, where applicable, recommendations that each group provided.

Group 1: Aligning Safety and TAM Functions

Group 1 discussed aligning agency safety functions with TAM, with a focus on integrating both safety and TAM as part of the agency culture. The group began by discussing where TAM is housed within the transit agency and how it related to safety, in terms of organizational structure alone. While most agencies represented housed TAM within other functional groups, one agency did locate the TAM group under the safety organization. For most agencies, the TAM function and the safety functions were entirely separate organizational units, thus limiting coordination between functions.

The group provided two overarching recommendations to better align safety and TAM functions:

- 1) Leverage **safety as a factor in asset prioritization** and scheduling meetings between business units to discuss prioritization; and
- 2) Recognize that safety comes first, while emphasizing the lessons learned from effective **asset management as a way to improve safety outcomes**—particularly through predictive modeling and trend analysis around past safety performance.

Group 2: Aligning Capital Planning and TAM Functions

Group 2 discussed the role of TAM both in short-term and long-term capital planning, and the need to coordinate between the TAM Plan and Capital Investment Plan (CIP), so that the TAM plan can feed directly into a capital needs inventory and support capital planning goals. The group identified two challenges to achieving this integration: 1) gaps in how capital spending is prioritized (e.g., based on legislative requirements, political will, regional priority, or formula spending) compared to the needs identified by an asset management plan; and 2) gaps in understanding between Capital Planning—where staff typically have accounting or management expertise—and the departments with direct roles in the asset lifecycle (procurement, operations, etc.). As next steps, the group had **three recommendations**:

- 1) Update **agency policies** to tie the TAM process and plan to overall investment prioritization;
- 2) Institute formal organizational processes to **bridge the gap in understanding** with Capital Planning and other functional units, such as rotational assignments or regular meetings; and
- 3) Evaluate comprehensive **decision support tools** that allow the agency as-a-whole to prioritize investments, independent of political pressure.

Group 3: Aligning Project Delivery and TAM Functions

Group 3 discussed two general scenarios for how project delivery and TAM functions were related at their agencies: a fully-staffed asset management department with one department head, reporting directly to Operations, Capital & Assets (who reports to the Board); or, a looser structure in which asset management is distributed throughout different organizations and project prioritization falls most to the projects that get the greatest attention. The second scenario seemed to be more common, which can result in important, but lower-visibility projects (e.g. grade crossings) getting less attention. Challenges to aligning project delivery and TAM that the group discussed include: 1) different ways of discussing project benefits and objectives across departments; and 2) balancing competing goals such as expanding service versus maintaining the existing system. The group recommended **three next steps**:

- 1) Agree as an agency on a **common process for project delivery and prioritization**, such as relying on LIDAR data as a common platform to implement design tweaks to a new system;
- 2) Ensure **unbiased project prioritization** at the agency level to balance competing goals and differences in priorities across departments; and
- 3) Identify and communicate a clear **decision making process for procurement** based on agreed-upon, agency-wide goals.

Group 4: Aligning Risk Management and TAM Functions

Group 4 discussed widely varying practices for how risk management itself is handled by different transit agencies, and how TAM might align with those practices. For example, a Tier 1 agency might have multiple departments addressing risk, TAM, procurement, operations, finance, and more. A small Tier 2 agency, though, might have one individual with responsibility for both risk management and TAM. Regardless, group members agreed that the greatest coordination around risk and TAM tends to occur after significant and disruptive incidents such as a service disruption or equipment failure. The biggest organizational challenge is then to translate that initial coordination into sustained collaboration around risk. To do so, agencies need to overcome significant barriers in time and resources, organizational siloes, and communications and terminology. As next steps, the group recommended the following:

- 1) Host **risk workshops** across the agency to begin an initial discussion;
- 2) Automatically generate **work orders for project managers** to manage risk ahead of time;
- 3) Require regular **condition inspections** for assets and components; and
- 4) Identify **liability factors for certain asset types** that are not always high priority in the capital budget, e.g. security cameras.

Group 5: Aligning State and MPO Coordination and TAM Functions

Group 5 began by discussing how coordinating across State and MPO partners around TAM can be a challenge in itself, since TAM functions are often situated in entirely different areas of an organization, such as operations, finance or planning. Thus many different partners, with different approaches to funding and asset management, need to coordinate. Likewise, there are many different ways that funding flows to an asset or a project, whether through State and local funds, Federal programs through the State, funds allocated to the MPO, and both centralized and distributed systems of funding. This can create political challenges, particularly for MPOs and local agencies. Overall, the group agreed that a primary goal should be to increase information sharing between MPOs and State DOTs, with close consideration of the appropriate political context.

Group 5 did not identify any specific recommendations, but encouraged frequent information sharing and discussion between MPOs and State DOTs.

Group 6: Aligning Agency Strategic Planning and TAM Functions

Group 6 emphasized the objective—raised by other groups as well—that TAM needs to be integrated throughout the agency, which includes in the strategic plan. The group focused especially on methods for stakeholders outside of the agency, in particular the MPO, to be involved in the discussion of why you are pursuing specific investments. The group highlighted two recommendations for agencies:

- 1) Leverage the **financial system to manage asset management data**, a common practice at some larger State DOTs.
- 2) Make sure to have a **clear data governance system** in place to avoid data getting into the wrong hands.

Group 7: Aligning Data Management/Governance and TAM Functions

Group 7 agreed with many other groups that the agency size affects how the agency handles TAM, particularly with respect to data management and governance. At larger agencies, regular communication and data sharing with the data owners and managers is critical, to ensure the greatest visibility over available agency data. For smaller agencies, having a single database or geospatial tool to share agency data can be enough to encourage data sharing. Overall, the group noted that most important is ensuring that everyone knows how to access information, and ensuring consistency in writing and style when inputting data. The group highlighted one recommendation along those lines:

- 1) Invest time to ensure everyone in the agency, as well as stakeholders and partner agencies if possible, can agree on a **naming convention for assets** (e.g. snow blower vs. snow thrower), coding, abbreviations, and punctuation for a central data system.

Group 8: Aligning Workforce Development and TAM Functions

Group 8 focused on three areas of workforce development—training and apprenticeship, succession planning, and updated job requirements for hiring in TAM-related functions. The group agreed that human resources (HR) needs to be involved in the TAM program, to strategize about how TAM can be integrated into the organization as a whole. Relatedly, transit agencies need to be strategic about succession planning, particularly with an aging workforce and the potential loss in institutional knowledge from retirements. The group emphasized three recommended actions:

1. **Update job requirements** to include language for TAM, both in the minimum requirements and in the description of responsibilities and duties.
2. Work with local universities and professional development organizations to **integrate TAM into curriculum development** for students and professionals.
3. **Tailor TAM communications in lay terms**, using multiple forms of media and communications to reach all segments of the organization.
4. Identify **key performance indicators for success**, to establish performance goals and identify long-term objectives.

Group 9: Aligning Federal Compliance and TAM Functions

Group 9 discussed the need for coordination across the different Federal compliance requirements, particularly when different reporting requirements are handled by different organizational units. For example, in some agencies, finance handles the NTD reporting, the CEO is the accountable executive, and the asset group reports to the COO. To promote success of the TAM program, all of these functions need to be aligned and project development and prioritization needs to be consistent. Ideally, the TAM program also connects to the Capital Investment Plan (CIP), which may require coordination with additional units. The greatest challenge to this alignment, therefore, is getting the right information at the right time through regular coordination. Group 9 recommends the following:



1. Identify regular opportunities to **discuss TAM and the Federal requirements with peers in other organizational units**, ideally on a daily to weekly basis to ensure steady communication. Share both successes and challenges and work with different units to problem solve around the challenges.
2. Ensure that the **data collected to support TAM is shared** throughout the organization.
3. Identify opportunities to move **beyond TAM as a Federal requirement** and to integrate asset management throughout the organization.

Additional Information

The group-by-group recommendations above are provided as a record of the discussion (note that these recommendations were shared by group members and do not specifically represent guidance or policy recommendations from FTA or the US Department of Transportation). The [discussion worksheets](#) from the workshop are available 2018 TAM Roundtable site, and all worksheets are free to use for additional discussions or group workshops at individual agencies or with groups of agencies.